
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	460-462 Ridge Street NW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Landmark/District:	Mount Vernon Square Historic District	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent Calendar
		<input type="checkbox"/> Denial Calendar
		<input type="checkbox"/> Permit Review
Meeting Date:	May 3, 2012	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	#12-210	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Brendan Meyer	<input type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

The applicant, Blue Sky Housing LLC (owner), seeks concept review for a new 2 and 3 story brick residential building on the vacant lot at 460 Ridge St NW and combining it with 462 Ridge Street NW for a total of six units. Plans were prepared by MWB Architects, PC.

Property Description and Context

Ridge Street is a narrow one-block street originally platted as an alley. The street is characterized by modest, two-story flat-fronted frame and brick houses, rare survivors of what were once typical and fairly common 19th century working class alley dwellings. The street contains at least 7 houses constructed before the Civil War, and despite a period of construction that spans from as early as 1855 to as late as 1911, they have a remarkable consistency of simple block forms, punched windows, and spare detailing.

The existing structure at 462 Ridge is two stories and three bays wide with a wood modillion and bracket cornice. It is 15 feet wide and 36 feet deep. The right bay is occupied by a garage door on the front façade, a relatively modern alteration that hints that that portion of 462 Ridge is not original to the house. Most likely, 462 was expanded to the west sometime in the early 20th century and the cornice extended across the new three bay width. The open space to the east of 462 Ridge is two building lots, but only the immediate adjacent lot is part of this concept review.

Proposal

The applicant proposes to echo the historic façade of 462 Ridge onto a new two-story, two bay wide front façade. The combined façade would be 41 feet wide and leave room for a 13 foot easement on the western edge of the property for use as a vehicle easement for church parking (this easement condition and use already exists). The garage bay on 462 Ridge would be eliminated and rebuilt with brick and double-hung windows to match the other bays. 460 Ridge would be ornamented and fenestrated with a similar rhythm of bays, cornice, windows and doors.

The new construction will extend the rear of 462 Ridge back an additional 30 feet for a new total depth of 66 feet. A third floor, set back 32 feet from the front façade, would have a roofline 11 feet above the second floor. The profile of the third floor would be canted back at the front with a continuous glazed front.

Evaluation and Recommendation

While the residences on Ridge Street are small by modern standards, the block's small, simple historic scale is fundamental to the character of this former alley. In its review of other projects on

the block, the Board has acted to preserve the low heights and visible rooflines of historic buildings on Ridge Street while allowing some additional flexibility and visibility for the roof lines of new construction. The most prominent example, because of its contemporary design, is 413-419 Ridge Street (HPA #02-496) which is compatible by virtue of its 2-story brick facades which align with the cornice line of its neighbors and the recessive nature of its third floors which are canted back and articulated in metal and glass. The juxtaposition of different materials emphasizes the low height of the street face, but sets apart the third floor in a natural and subtle way. 447 Ridge Street (HPA #09-357, currently under construction) is a more recent example of new construction in which the Board approved a concept plan for a third floor setback 30 feet from the two story front façade. In the cases of existing buildings, the Board has generally approved rear additions that read as alterations of roof slopes rather than completely new volumes that stand proud of the historic buildings below (438 Ridge Street #09-147 and 481 Ridge Street #10-071).

In this case the third floor is clearly and prominently visible from many views along the street. The site conditions afford little room to mask a third floor of any livable size. Sight lines along the block to both east and west are clear and long. To the east are several vacant lots and a lone two story rowhouse, while to the west the adjacent two lots are occupied by two-story rowhouses that are set back from the property line almost 20 feet.

The concept design borrows the shape and form of the third floor from the compatible design at 413-419 Ridge Street, but the differences between the two sites do not make the concept transferable. At 413-419, the scale of the construction, with its repetitive forms from unit to unit and its position at the end of the row, establishes a substantial presence of its own separate from the rest of the row. It did not need to fit in as much as it only needed to establish a peaceful proximal presence. Problematically at 460-462, the canted back third floor form is too narrow to establish its own stature, and since it is inserted in the middle of a historic block, it stands unsubtly and lonely above its surroundings. The selection of materials for the third floor has no influence on this evaluation since this is squarely a question of massing and visibility.

The remainder of the project has many positive attributes that on their own would be a compatible development in the historic district. The replacement of a vacant lot with a two-story façade that in all substantial ways replicates the material, size, rhythm and height of a historic Ridge Street house, is the most obvious of these. Removing the incongruous garage door on the front façade would also be a compatible alteration.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find the concept for a two-story building with a visible setback third floor at 460-462 Ridge Street NW to be incompatible with the character of the historic district and therefore not consistent with the purposes of the preservation act.